



into surface / 走进

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and my dear friends and family.

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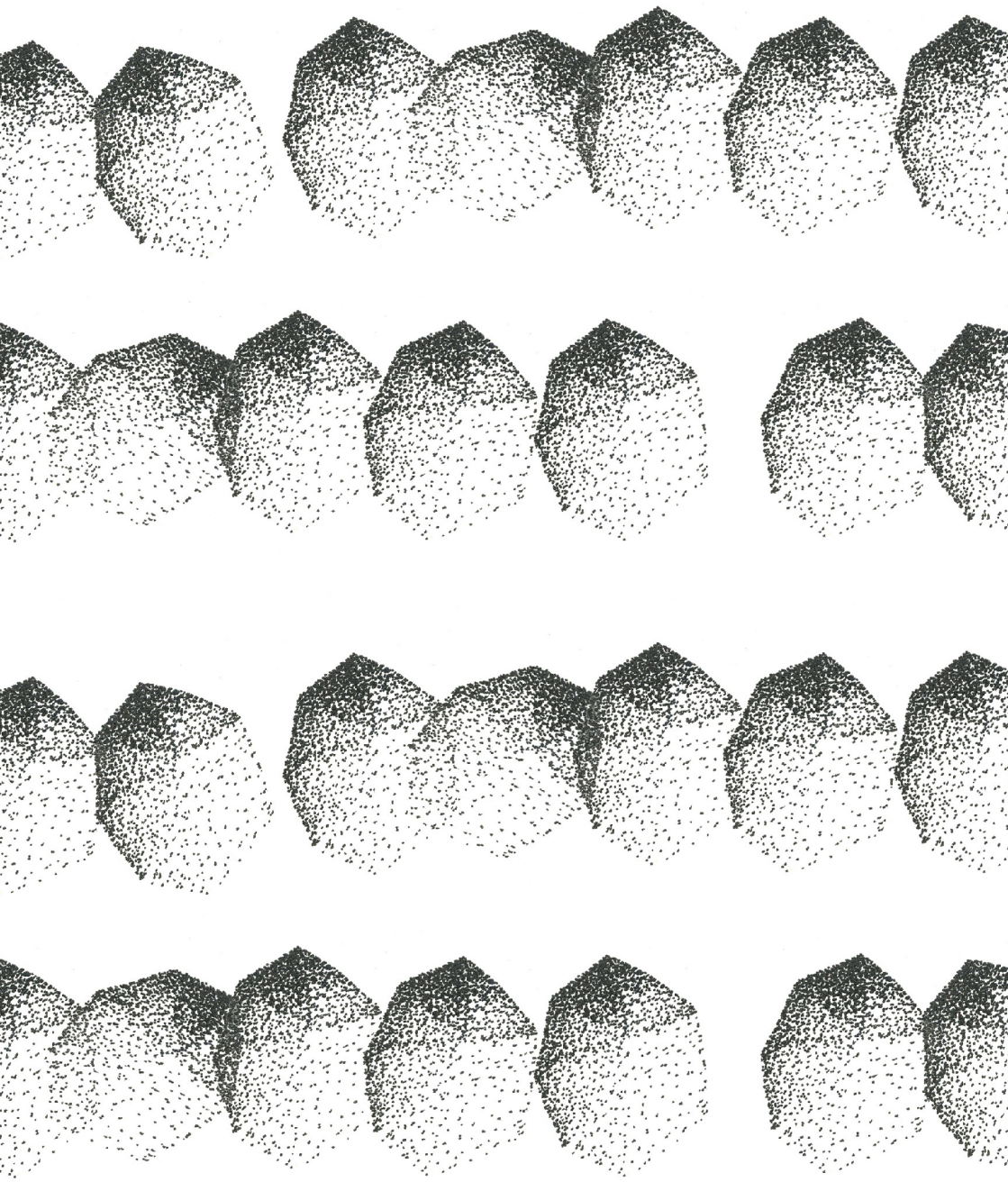
This master thesis explores the everyday aesthetics¹ of a vessel in terms of Applied Arts by studying context rather than merely seeking an appearance. The initial idea was the exploration of lacquer material and the relevant surface treatment that is inspired by the love of nature, providing a subjective visual experience, while retaining the functional ceramic vessel. As the material experiment developed, it raised another question of how lacquer ware, from a perspective of traditional folk crafts, which is considered time-consuming and labour intensive, could evoke a genuine beauty and sincere worship.

This thesis could be divided into two components, firstly as research for gaining fundamental knowledge in developing and supporting ideas for the design work and secondly the practical production of the design work.

Through a subjective contemplation of the theme, inspirations such as modernism, Mingei theory and aesthetic song wares were introduced. Different thoughts worked together with my approach and centralized on one concrete idea, lacquer surface treatment applied to a ceramic tea set. As a result, the tea set is functionally inspired by Traditional Chinese Kongfu tea set but visually presented in a modern aesthetic.

Keywords: everyday Aesthetics, lacquer, surface treatment, ceramic tea set, modernism, Mingei theory, and aesthetic song wares

¹ Everyday Aesthetics is a recent subfield of philosophical aesthetics focusing on everyday events, but its definition is still argued by western and eastern scholars. As western aesthetic theories of the past few centuries also neglect everyday aesthetics because of their almost exclusive emphasis on art. In the book "Everyday Aesthetics", Yuriko Saito provides a detailed investigation into our everyday aesthetic experiences, and reveals how our everyday aesthetic tastes and judgments can exert a powerful influence on the state of the world and our quality of life. By analyzing a wide range of examples from our aesthetic interactions with nature, the environment, everyday objects, and Japanese culture, Saito illustrates the complex nature of seemingly simple and innocuous aesthetic responses. She discusses the inadequacy of art-centered aesthetics, the aesthetic appreciation of the distinctive characters of objects or phenomena, responses to various manifestations of transience, and the aesthetic expression of moral values; and she examines the moral, political, existential, and environmental implications of these and other issues. (Saito, 2007) And in my thesis, I would refer to Aesthetics as a notion of everyday Aesthetics.



Beginner's Mind

“In the beginner’s mind there are many possibilities,
but in the expert’s there are few.”

Beginner's Mind

"In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, but in the expert's there are few."

(Suzuki, 1973 P27)

—Shunryu Suzuki, Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind

The famous ancient Chinese carpenter Lu ban¹ expressed similar thoughts when he said: it takes ten years to master a craft, but more than thirty years to forget it. In my view, when you are proficient in something, you become less curious and even sometimes apathetic. To keep a beginner's mind that is not easy but it is sufficiently important for a practitioner.

I examined my beginner's mind before I devoted myself to this thesis. During these months, I stayed in the ceramic workshop almost every day. Many times I nearly became exhausted with the endless repetition, the four stories I have used a lot for raising my spirits gave me encouragement again. Hence, I regard them as the stories about the beginner's mind.

Story 1

Impulsion to lacquer²

1. Lu Ban (鲁班 in Chinese) (507–440 BC) was an ancient Chinese carpenter, engineer, and inventor. He was a contemporary of Mozi, and is the patron saint of Chinese builders and contractors.

2. Lacquer (大漆 daqi in Chinese and 漆 urushi in Japanese), Lacquerware are objects decoratively covered with lacquer. The lacquer is sometimes inlaid or carved. Lacquerware includes boxes, tableware, buttons and even coffins painted with lacquer in cultures mostly in Eastern Asia. (王世襄, 1998)

There are many reasons to choose lacquer as a material in my thesis work. However, the impulsion is the crucial driving force. My first touch of lacquer/urushi ware surface is a Japanese miso soup bowl, and I was captivated by the moist and satiny tactile sense. The piece could easily be described as ethereal, delicate, and exquisite visually, but my favorite word for it is being touched. The tactile sense from lacquer is moisture or wetness, but also gain, richness and warmth, which is so distinguished from other materials. We usually identify an object from a visual sense by looking at the form and colors, yet, the tactile sense sometimes offers extraordinary characteristic. It is hard to describe how enthusiastic I was, just made up my mind to work with this material for my thesis project.

In martial arts, impulsion is the wisdom of the warrior. When faced with a mistake or an accident, we might assume that we will lose out. However, mistakes would transfer to their opposite sides when you hold a beginner's mind. When you weigh and consider from mistakes, treat them as an inspirational source, and seek a new way forward, based on the interaction between former experience and mistakes. Also, impulsion helps with building the don't know mind when we face to the unknown. Don't know means keeping an open mind and responding according to circumstances, not according to how we assume things will be. A don't know mind leaves room for intuition. (Suzuki, 1970)

Story2

Color and surface exploration

During my MA study, I have attempted to find inspiration from different. I attended a glass color and surface course with lecturer Laura Isoniemi from the Textile Design Department. The idea behind this course is to try and link the existing skills and techniques with new ideas and possibilities. We explored the different methods with both ordinary and unusual tools, for example, pens, paper, ink and something from the office but also a rolling pin, tissues and vegetables from the kitchen. Valuing coincidence, seizing the moment, and identifying and realizing possibilities are core factors in the study of creativity.

The course presents a state of mind which disregards common sense. 'Common sense' is what the culture regards as 'normal'. For instance, when I get used to painting an object with the realistic approach, I merely observe them as 'normal' methods. When I myself have invented an unexpected approach to painting, my drawing doesn't look at any concrete object or scenery. Because I just put them in the memory, and wait until they evoke the memory, as the drawing presents the most impressive element. I learned how to release myself from common sense and became creative from this course. Each of these little exercises gives me a little experience. These experiences are called awareness. From practicing this little awareness, gradually you can put together a whole experience of being awareness itself (Suzuki, 1970).

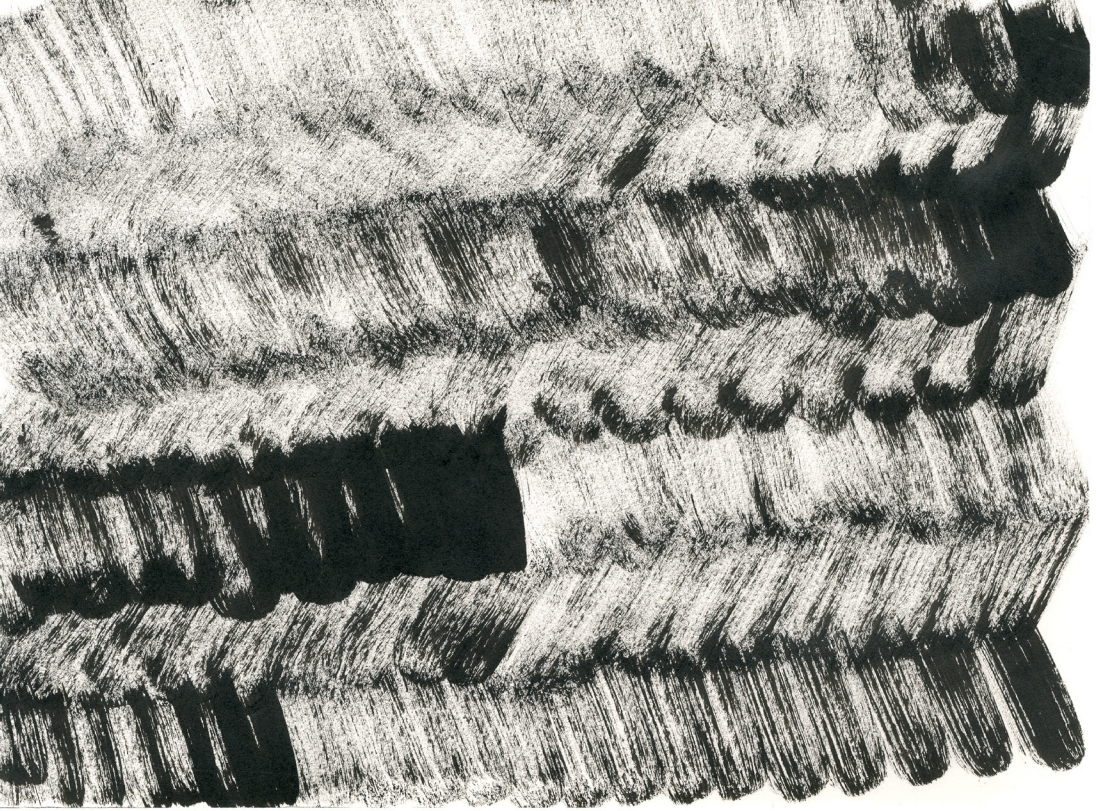
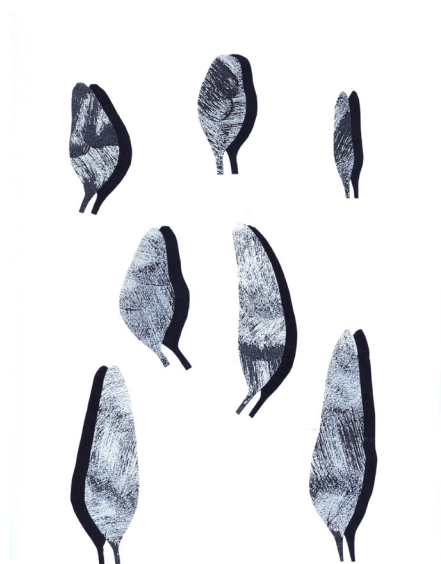


Figure 1 (top)

Figure 2 (right): one of my favorite pattern from this course, I first started with the experiment of brush stroke with one old felt. And I got the surface (Figure 1). Later on, cut this surface prints follow the profiles that are selected from real eucalyptus leaves, and play with different compositions and repeats.



Story³

Insight into Yixing teapot

I knew Yixing clay teapot, but I did not appreciate it until witnessing the process of making.

A personal note in April, 2014, Xiyong, Jiangsu, China

In April of 2014, a few days before I went back to Finland, I came across a Yixing teapot factory. Yixing teapot has been regarded as the best brewer of tea in China, as a result of the special characters of the clay. Since Song Dynasty (10th century), potters from city Yixing has used this local clay (zisha or zhuni in Chinese) making functional teapot. The teapot factory I have visited that is a small family business like most of other factories.

The Potter first beats a lump of prepared clay into a flat sheet, then cut the wall, bottom and lid from the clay sheet with the aid of templates. All the pieces are assembled on a simple, hand-turned wheel, stuck together with a mixture of clay and water. Finally, around the pot are beaten into shape, and smoothed out and polished with tools made of wood and buffalo horn.

A personal note of observing the making process of Yixing Teapot

Put the characteristics of clay and Yixing teapot aside, and lay the burden of tea culture down. I feel more inspired by the making process, as a result of a new perspective from a ceramic designer. Potter artisans have never “designed” a teapot but create the classical look. I try to examine the form and details and discover the essential features from them, which provides me the new knowledge of this ancient craftsmanship. Superficially, its petite size is intended to be used for Kongfu tea³, spiritually it indicates a prominent balance between human being and material, material and form and form and function.

Something has become “normal” in the everyday life but always look at it from a new perspective. The hands-on experience allows me to empathize with people who devote themselves to teapot making. Beginner’s mind doesn’t mean negating experience; it means keeping an open mind on how to apply our experience to each new circumstance.

3. The Kongfu tea(功夫茶 in Chinese), is kind of Chinese tea ceremony. The term literally means “making tea with effort”. Today, the approach is used popularly by teashops carrying tea of Chinese origins, and by tea connoisseurs as a way to maximize the taste of a tea selection, especially a finer one. (Jolliffe, 2007)

Beginner's Mind

Story₄

Broken clock

Immerse yourself in your action and forget the watcher. (Babauta, 2008)

At the end of May, I was suffering from insomnia for a couple of days. The glass workshop was about to close for the summer vacation, but I still needed to make a glass tray. Meanwhile, I felt under so much stress about my thesis project, and then fear and anxiety gripped me. In one afternoon, I was grounding my glass tray in the glass workshop. Many times I glanced at the clock; it stayed at two p.m. without moving forward. I was not aware of that, and just concentrated on my glasswork. Grounding glass consumed the physical and erased the mental stress. Having a neglect of the time until the workshop time was done. But thanks to the broken clock, having no sense of time that helps with being in a world of my own. From then on, I released myself.

I become too hesitant sometimes when I meet problems; that was because of the fear of failure and overamplification of time pressure. My mind is sometimes restricted by timetable, so that I feel difficult to immerse in my work. Beginner's mind came back and I understood about the importance of concentration, I recharged myself again.

In the next chapters, I would like to start with an analyses and critique of myself, by rewinding the clock back to my childhood memories to explore where my interests and inspirations lie. Also, more thoughts related to beginner's mind will be mentioned coherently with my personal approach to ceramics.

The Awakening

The Awakening

Background

Fingers and initial mind

Unlike other Chinese kids, learning Chinese calligraphy was my desire, it did not come from my parents. However, still, for an active and wild 6-year-old kid, it was an impossible mission to sit in the chair and practice calligraphy for a couple of hours every day. If someone considers life can change in an instant because of an unexpected encounter, I believe something happens every day and continues for 15 years that can exert a subtle influence on somebody's character. Unconsciously I became calm and quiet, and my insight and perceptive grew. As a consequence of practicing calligraphy, my fingers gained sensibility of subtle movements. In Chinese ideology, the supreme beauty of the moment is when the artisan's hand and mind works as one. I have never achieved anything close to it, still, I guess my hands comprehended the essence before my mind memorized and digested the theory of Chinese calligraphy.

All the knowledge and methodology is the only conclusion from an appreciator. But the artisan creates supreme beauty through sufficient emotion and rich imagination when they escape from techniques and skills and forget about theories and principles. Of course, it is a factor that learning Chinese calligraphy provides me with a traditional and fundamental aesthetic value. As we can see, most of the Chinese characters are well-constructed and pictographic. Afterwards, I noticed the fundamental and classical aesthetic value I had gained unconsciously during those times, which appears in my drawing and sculpting skills today.

Brainstorm and creativity

In the meantime, I have been receiving the modern art and design education. I started professional art studies in my high school. Because of a desire for creating objects, I was determined to be an industrial designer, and then I did my bachelor degree in industrial design. Modernism and Western art are particularly influential for me. During the first stage of my design study, the philosophies of late nineteenth and early twentieth-centu-

ry, like “Art and craft movement”, “Art Nouveau”, “Bauhaus”, “Modernism” and “Scandinavia Design”, have inspired me. The school’s education has merely focused on creative thinking and innovation ability. The most frequently used design process is to start with a brainstorm, get ideas, and 3D molding and rendering. However, what I acquired from the study was merely computer skills.

I started feeling so confused about my major and started to doubt myself in the last year of my college study. We had a course for mold making, but there was a lack of good workshop facilities and masters, I didn’t gain any practical experience. I think the negative feeling was partly from that. Also, too many design projects that I have done from that time are conceptual and impractical. Gradually, I shifted my interests from industrial products to traditional crafts. I was not aware of my vision until I met Prof. Pekka Korvenmaa. He suggested that I should apply for the Applied Art and Design Department in our school when he went through my portfolio. Even though I could not understand the intention of applied art and design at that time, luckily I was selected.

Awakening as an apprentice

Whilst studying at Aalto University, I started my ceramic journey by chance after taking the Ceramic and Glass studio course. Unconsciously, I shifted my interest to ceramics. The course was very short, but I have continually improved the quality of my product in the following half a year. During the apprentice time, I made a vast amount of practice plaster molds and thousands of ceramic making repeats. This forced me to embrace and understand both the hand and the machine. This implies my vision as an industrial designer has been sufficiently expanded.

Throughout my study of ceramics, the emphasis has been strongly placed on developing three-dimensional forms. Industrial design thinking still influenced me in some aspects, for example, attention given to symmetry and regularity. In my first ceramic project (Figure 5), I designed and made a teacup that has focused on the warped lid. Because the aim was to make the lid fit with the cup, I spent three months to make a solid casting mold for the cup, so that the cup could keep the round form better. During the time when I was competing with the machine, the question was raised that was I too attracted by machine-made beauty, whilst negating the power of hands-on experience. I understand that by their nature machines have more power than the hand and that there is a limit to what the hand can do, just as the hand has its limitations, so does the machine. (Yanagi, 1989)

Life of a maker generates for me the appreciation of the man’s hand and enhances my beginner’ mind as an apprentice. No machine can compare with a man’s hands, as machinery gives speed, power, complete uniformity, and precision, but it cannot give creativity, adaptability, freedom, heterogeneity. (Yanagi, 1989, p. 108)

The environment on my thought

Beauty is defined as, the quality of being pleasing, especially to look at, or some or something that gives great pleasure, especially visually (University, 2015). When we regard beauty as a concept used in visual perception, we may “see” beauty through our eyes, but not every person can see the same beauty.

To be unable to see the beauty properly is not because of the lack of a basic foundation for any aesthetic understanding. I believe that seeing and knowing are often separate. We learn many principles of design in the modern age. But beauty is no qualification, seeing and knowing from an exterior and an interior, not a right and a wrong. We have to understand beauty. Therefore, intuition is more essence than intellectual perception. I would like to give some examples of how my thoughts have changed, and how my intuition of beauty has been created.

I was raised in the city of Hangzhou. It is a city with easy access to nature. My father often brought me to the mountain areas, and when I was young, I could easily tell the names of plants, but the more I grew up, the fewer contacts I had with the natural world, because of the increasingly rapid urbanization and heavy studies. It feels like something has been cut off from my life, and my view of the world and perception of beauty grew up with the modern society.

Since moving to Finland, I have had the life with the forest again. White nights and long and dark winters are something I wasn't familiar with, after suffering through the winter, I now feel a tremendous difference between alone and lonely. I could be extremely lonely in the city. But I like being alone in the forest, particularly, when I am running and just being with my thoughts. In the city, especially in the evening of weekends, seeing the shops closed, the lights off and people leaving for home, I was terrified. On the other hand, I would never feel lonely in the forest. When I am picking blueberries and mushroom, the world just seems abundant. I even see different types of blueberries from the subtle differences. It is a magical world that I have become addicted to and I can release myself there. The forest has given me a new respect for the importance of observation and consideration. People who live close to nature, may have a spiritual appreciation for sublime simplicity and for those people the beauty captured in the opening of a single bud will be far more evocative than other inspirations. (Juniper, 2003)

I designed and made Afamily Vase set (Figure 4) when I was studying at Musashino Art University. Life in Japan allowed me to stand on the peak of a mountain with clouds and mist. An old Chinese poem is saying: The true face of Lushan¹ is beyond the ken of one deep in the heart of the mountain. The truth is incomprehensible to one too deeply involved to be

1. Mount Lu or Lushan (庐山 in Chinese), also known as Kuanglu (匡庐) in ancient times, is situated in the northern part of Jiangxi province in southeastern China, and is one of the most renowned mountains in the country.



Figure 4 name: Lip tea cup, material : porcelain. I designed and made in 2011 winter, Helsinki

Figure 5 name: AFamily, material : porcelain. I designed and made in 2013 summer, Tokyo, Japan

objective. I have embraced the mountain again, found my aesthetic sensibility. As a result, an intuitive appreciation of transient beauty in the physical world reflects the irreversible flow of life in the spiritual world. I have rather more experiments with my hands, for instance, sculpting the form from the subjective world. The Vase set indicates my understanding of beauty that exists in the modest, rustic and imperfect.

After returning from the journey, being lost with ideas, I spent about a month just contemplating. I thought, walked and watched the skies and stars, hoping to receive new ideas descending from above. I realized that the pursuit of deformation, discarding conventional form and the quest for freedom from are growing in my concepts. Sometimes, I ask myself, what makes changes me? Nature, environment or social patterns? As a consequence of living both in Western and Eastern societies, I increasingly clarified my culture and mindset. Like Yo-Yo Ma said: "Our cultural strength has always been derived from our diversity of understanding and experience." In this case, I have a vision of myself as a bridge-builder, building bridges between people, between cultures, between habits, and trying to find common ground. Therefore, I believed design and crafts that own the universal form and are unaffected by emotion would be the best answer until I developed this new understanding.

"Good work proceeding from the whole man, heart, head, and hand, in proper balance."
---- Soetsu Yanagi's (Yanagi, 1989, p. 95)

Consequently, having worked with ceramics again, I consider myself as a bridge-builder who utilizes the skill of crafting as a reflective tool to generate artistic expressions in the service of the everyday utility. The fact is that everyday aesthetics has had a negative environmental impact during my interaction with the natural world, however this also indicates the possibility that the power of culture to influence my inner sensibility of aesthetic can effect my thoughts on creating objects.

Influence

Influence

Organic modernism

'Organic forms, often inspired by nature, are commonly represented. As Fiell (2002) states that this affinity towards 'the natural world rather than the machine, led designers from Alvar Aalto and Arne Jacobson to Jens Quistgaard and Tapio Wirkkala to pioneer the concept of Organic Modernism which became a major theme within Scandinavian Design.' (Davey, 2014).

Modernism is a movement within art, design, and architecture that took place in the late 19th and 20th centuries. Particularly as a result of the Industrial Revolution, which led to the concept of mass-production becoming important within Craft and Design, modernism was the development of modern industrial societies and the rapid growth of cities. When it swept through Europe and America, it generated many different styles that can be characterized as Modernist. For my design, modernism theory has most affected me. I guess it is not only because of my life in Finland but also I dedicate my soul with minimalist aesthetics, universal form and timeless language. However, I would analyze the distinctive Finnish design as "Organic Modernism", and from that to point out my reflections and thoughts.

I consider that organic Modernism or Modernism in Nature, which is about that designers and architects, especially the more avant-garde, turned away from mainstream Modernism and shifted their attention to Nature. 'Eye, hand and thought' (Aav, 2000) is the name of Tapio Wirkkala's biography, but also three-beautiful-words tells all the stories about the particular Finnish Modernism design.

Eye

Organic Modernism is often designed and visually derived from nature, for instance, the shape of leaves, petioles and mushrooms, the spirals of shells the turbulence of

water and ice formations. (Aav, 2000, p. 14) I believe that no Finnish designers could skip the influence from Finnish nature in their life. Tapio Wirkkala so often felt the need to withdraw into the solitude of Lapland. He is just one of the Finnish designers I knew who would spend a lot of time in Finnish nature. Kaj Franck was asked about the characteristics of a Finnish designer, his answer is also telling the story about "Finnish feeling of nature". Apart from studying the stories from great masters, I also attempted to understand the way of seeing nature in person. Sometimes when my eyes see the beautiful sceneries that have accumulated and influenced as time goes on, I start to search inspirations from what I have seen. Therefore, in my view, designers have gradually understood the principle of organic design because they have spent enough time to "see" and "feel" the beauty from the natural world. Their sense of color form and materials has been fully developed, for example from colors of moss, shapes of leaves, and textures of stone.

Hand

Meanwhile, Organic Modernism sometimes could be less distinct and more unrecognizable through the influence of natural rhythms and textures, and it becomes difficult to trace the origins of design from their shapes. Because the Finnish designer has another particular dialog between nature which is making things with hands. Dexterous hands from craftsmen give an extension from their eyesight. Touches from fingertips and sculpting with hands help with understanding of materials and new experiments. I believe that working with the hand provides a deep insight into modern design, that designers and artists apply the forms of natural creations: rather, the forms are stylized and abstracted (Vihma, 2000, p. 83).

I believe that Tapio Wirkkala's plywood sculpture *Leaf Dish* (figure 6) is one of the most representative works that indicates the power of a human being's hand. Plywood is semantically artificial and inexpensive. But though Tapio's experiment of sculpting laminated layers of aircraft plywood, and his work demotivates the feature of life and humanity. From my view, nature provided a new guiding principle in which form was derived from the function and natural geometry. The designer's hand is also a source of materials that could be shaped by human creativity.

Thought

Sometimes we only see simplicity and purity from Finnish design, but behind the unity there are opposites. Internationalism and cultural individuality are contradictory and mutually exclusive characteristics of the Finnish design. The unity of opposites is often seen from Finnish design and gives Finnish design richness of association and timelessness. (Aav, 2000) I would also like to analyze what gives them these contradictions from the aspect of natural impacts.

Influence

I have no doubt that Finnish nature consists of all kinds of exclusive extremes. For instance, from summer to winter we see the bright and dark, colorful and colorless, and life and death. But the extreme phenomena contain the continuous process of creation. Finnish people, who have seen the repeated process-winter, spring, summer, autumn from their childhood, still retain a sense of wonder from each new cycle. They have explored the complicated relationship between their view as primitive, child-like and nature-dominated beings, and the outside world. (Opie, 2000, p. 52)

Traditionally – innovativeness

.....

Artistic – functional

Organic – geometric

.....

Homeliness, familiarity – exoticness, strangeness

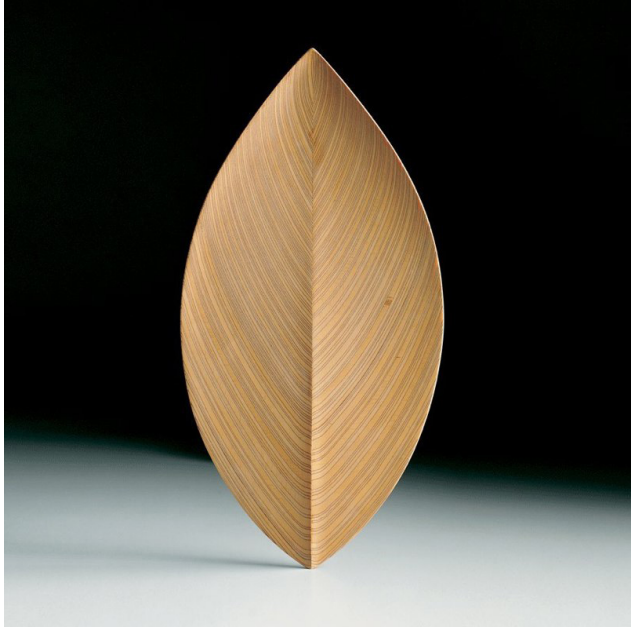
Finnishness – internationality

(Aav, 2000, p. 12)

I selected few pairs of antinomies from the book "eye, hand and thought, which has helped me understand the unity of opposites that is inside Finnish design philosophy. For instance, the natural word always provides answers to people's explorations. Personally, it feels like nature is a book that contains the law of materials, the principle of making the thing, and the theory of design. For instance: On the one hand, nature breeds the traditions of crafts, because of the isolated living conditions, people have to equip their home with carpenter skills. But on the other hand, sufficient practice provides the possibilities of innovations. People gain the artistic thinking influenced from the natural creation, but also study how to abstract their inspirations to be simple and geometric, for developing them to be functional and minimalist.

I believe that, after the Golden age of Finnish design, the fact that people still insist on their love of nature in design, even if it is not evident or observable, indicates a genuine interest in diversified cultures of the world. That is why Finland is a small nation but contains an enormous inclusive innovation. "Finnishness" which is about its authentic, original, essentially exotic, quality.

Modernism in terms of its characters of functionality and simplicity is the most influential movement of twenty century in Western society. We see its diversity and capacity, even when it comes across an "opposite" culture, which is oriental. In the next section, I will discuss how Modernism moved forward in Japan, and interacted and mutually influenced from Art and crafts in Asian culture, resulting in a value reference for Modern design in China.



*Figure 6 Leaf Dish, laminated plywood, 480*245mm, Museum of Art and Design*

Mingei Theory

It is the theory from Japan, but mirroring my culture and thought.

A personal Note in Summer 2013, Tokyo, Japan

Mingei theory¹ was one of the modern crafts/design theories in Japan. When I first thought about the theory that has influenced me deeply and profoundly, mingei just jumped into my mind. I read many books from Yanagi Soetsu² when my interests of the study moved towards crafts and was gradually determined to be a crafts-designer. Also, I visited the Japan Folk Crafts Museum 2014 when I was an exchange student at Musashino Art University. It is a wooden building using Oya-stone and designed by Yanagi himself. Although photography is not allowed in the museum, when I was stepping on the wooden floor without shoes and hearing the sound of squeaks my body recorded all the feeling to exhibits. From the theory, I have built the thought, which design should have the relevance with traditional crafts. As I understand from Yanagi's theory should simply put that traditional crafts exist for ordinary use and will never fade out from modern life, regardless of highly industrialized development. Because design if it is without the spirit of craftsmanship, then it is inconceivable.

However, In China, we have not experienced any Industrial Revolutions as in Europe or Japan. In the recent half century, especially industrial design has grown up very fast as a demand of the industrialization of China. With rapid growth, many problems surfaced. I attempt to examine some of the problems in terms of re-establishment of art in the relationship to the ordinary life.

Since China's reform and opening-up, the overwhelming influx of Western ideas has had an enormous impact. Most people have not understood this and in addition have failed to appreciate their own cultural inheritance. They regard everything western as new and progressive and everything traditional as retrogressive. We learn very fast from all of Western design methodology and aesthetic value, but only learnt 'creative' as subverting tradition but not discovering and inheriting. While looking at crafts passed on by our ancestors, we're not only able to grasp and learn from their way of living, but they can

1. Mingei(民藝 in Japanese) literally means 'art of the people', hence folk-crafts. Yanagi created Mingei theory in the 1920s. It was one of the first modern crafts/design theories in Japan.

2. Yanagi Sōetsu (柳 宗悦, 1889 - 1961), was a Japanese philosopher and founder of the mingei (folk craft) movement in Japan in the late 1920s and 1930s.

also enrich us with the imagination of aesthetics.

'Emulation is one thing, and this blind imitation in the belief that something new is being achieved is misguided because the only true, and at the same time new, things can grow from Japanese roots. The truth is both old and new.'

----- (Yanagi, 1989, p. 104)

"It stands for the arts of the people, returned to the people." (Yanagi, 1989, p. 101)

The folkcrafts should best judge the quality of the life of the people in this country. A few decades ago, a lot of folk crafts products used to be our everyday life objects. For instance, long wooden benches from carpenters have been adapted for various uses. Chinese wooden benches, which are a long seat, steady structure but also light and easy to carry and store. Also, bamboo products are popular in summer, especially mats and couch, which has been processed with different techniques, like surface finishing, waving and knit. These quick-growing materials still retain the beauty of raw texture and surface but being pleasantly cool feeling with physical closeness. Another example from the Chinese kitchen, a porcelain rice bowl (Figure 7) made from Jingdezhen presents "art of people". The inexpensive hand-made bowl for ordinary use, which was made by unknown craftsmen, it has been in large scale mass production during the 1970s and selling both in domestic and overseas markets (Chenxiaodan, 2005, p. 4). Different products, but we can see the beauty from their ordinary use in everyday life. Therefore, I understand that for everyday objects that stand up to use, it does not matter whether they are made in conformity with the principle or Mingei theory.

Having looked back at the influence of Mingei theory, it is widely known in the West as well. Apparently, it is a hybrid theory with some core ideas from many Western sources, such as Art and Crafts movements from British, Scandinavian Craft philosophy, and Japanese Buddhist rhetoric and Tea Masters. (Kikuchi, 2006, p. 37) Finally the theory has had a profound influence on Japanese industrial art and design.

After the Second World War, Japan experienced a rapid transformation and was compelled to transform itself from a military power into an economic one. History indicates that they also faced the problem, which was they sold the product at the lower price, but poorer quality – "made in Japan" meant shoddy goods. Then a young group of Japanese architects and furniture designers, such as Sori Yanagi³, the son of Soetsu Yanagi, played a key role in the early years of the modern Japanese design movement. He is both a representative of the wholly Japanese modern designer and a full-blown modernist who merged simplicity and practicality with elements of traditional Japanese crafts. Most of Yanagi's designs are very simple and beautiful. His products illustrate his

3. Sori Yanagi (柳宗理 in Japanese, 1915–2011) was one of the most famous product designers in Japan. He played a role in Japanese modern design developed after World War 2 to the high-growth period in the Japanese economy. One of the most famous pieces of furniture is his Butterfly Stool. (Yanagi, 2012)

Influence



*Figure 7 Traditional Chinese rice bowl.
Made in Jingdezhen*

*Figure 8 Earthen Teapot, this pot was
designed by Soetsu Yanagi in 1956 and
got a gold award at 11th Milano Triennale
(1957). This pot is not the most famous
work from Sori, but it presents his ideas
about functionalism and universal form.*

*Figure 9 Shallow Ricebowl (1992) Masa-
hiro Mori*

thinking: true beauty is not made, it is born naturally. When he created a new product, he made the first versions over and over by hand, seeking new forms that took shape from both new and old ideas. (Yanagi, 2012) (Figure 9)

Another of my favorite potters and designer from that period is Masashiro Mori⁴. He had an industrial design background that affected his design philosophy: "I want to give form to tableware that people can use every day. Factory production makes it possible for many people to enjoy it in their daily life. As a designer, that gives me great pleasure." (Kenji Kanko, 2002, p. 14) He designed the surface treatment methods that are easy to process by craftsman but provided the unique pattern for bowls (Figure 9). Both of their designs reflect an understanding of industrial production without missing the lightness and delicacy that is a characteristic of Japanese traditional crafts.

In the same period, Industrial capitalism flourished in China, as it has been the world's factory, which produces and exports a wide range of products for the rest of the world. History clearly indicates that handicrafts declined in China, and suddenly there was a sharp loss of beauty in all the crafts. Even though it was understandable when I learnt the history over this fifty-year period that people had suffered from starvation and privation.

When the quality, beauty, and health of an object are all secondary considerations, machinery took over from human hands; rapid-production replaced craftsmanship; and ugly products destroy the beauty of folk crafts. However, consumption of folk crafts does not mean going backwards to reject what we have gained through mechanization, it just preserves respect and admiration for craftsmanship. We always say Folkcrafts are disappearing, but we could avert the increasing amount of bad factory products and the extinction of craftsmanship if people are aware of how valuable the folk crafts are. Apart from Mingei theory, I also learned from other theories that have the mutual influence of different art and design thought around the world. But since the First World War, globalization has been an irreversible trend, which stimulates the collision of different cultures, especially in Applied Art⁵. The Industrial revolutions provide the possibilities, but various cultures share an obsession with functionality married to a deep respect for traditional craftsmanship. The folk-crafts movement has never actually ended its morals aesthetics and politics are still evident today. We love knowing how things are made and whether they are made well or not. Even though we rely on technology more than at any point in human history we also still care about how and why something is made. For instance, from Masashiro Mori and Yanagi Soetsu's work, we see the modern Japanese design that contains the mind and wisdom from the old. The result is the design that

4. Masahiro Mori (森 正洋 in Japanese, 1927 –2005) was a Japanese ceramic designer born in Saga Prefecture, Japan, whose work marked an epoch in design of mass-produced ceramics. (Kenji Kanko, Masanori Moroyama, Hitomi Kitamura, 2002)

5. Applied art: any art that applies aesthetic principles to the design or decoration of useful objects, such as industrial design, bookmaking, illustration, printmaking, and commercial art. (Anon., 2015)

Influence

looks to the past, present and future simultaneously.

I believe now in China, our industry has progressed far enough, which provides a sufficient circumstance for the birth of "Chinese Applied Art". But back to tradition, will be the key factor in a new revolution. Particular, we have to stop replicating but creating with the spirit of domestic craftsmanship. In my thesis work, I attempt to find sublime faith and genuine beauty from lacquer and ceramic craftsmanship and analyse them from a Modernism mind. For it is there that I may bring a discussion about how to rebuild a fresh standard and a universal language from folk crafts. In the following section, I would excavate the brilliant aesthetic Song wares as a result that they may share some similar ideology of Art and Craft as Mingei theory, but are original from the ancient time of China.

Aesthetic Song wares

The Song Dynasty was the cultural peak of medieval China. There was blossoming of and advancements in the arts, crafts, music, literature, and philosophy. Especially in ceramics, Song wares have been so renowned for their elegance, restraint, equilibrium and beauty that the dynasty has long been regarded as the classic period of Chinese ceramics. (S.J.Vainker, 1995, p. 88). Compared with the magnificence of Tang, I have my preference for the simplicity of Song. To discuss Song is not focused on the masterpieces from the museums and collectors, but to consider the value and spirituality from it. If something evokes feelings of an intangible yearning, then that something should be explored. Having looked at the properties of aesthetic Song wares, I will look at on to the aspects in which these ideas can be used in modern living.

More simple, more difficult.

--Jiangxun , A talk about Song's minimalist aesthetic in Taipei, 2014

The Song wares we talk about today have never been surpassed. It is the exploration of clay, glaze and firing that give the Song Potter a thorough understanding of crafts so that the forms and colours produced were deceptively simple. The discreet ornament chose to complement those forms and colours resulted in ceramics with an aesthetic attraction that concealed the technical accomplishment that produced them. The combination of unobtrusive technical discipline and obvious loveliness is what lies behind the reputation of song wares as classics and masterpieces. (S.J.Vainker, 1995) However, I believe the best and wisest Song minds have seen it and expressed it in their modern folk wisdom and aesthetics even many centuries later. Apparently, no matter how much effort we put into the study of Song wares, we cannot copy and reproduce them in the same way as they were in the ancient times. Nonetheless, I came to the realization that it is not the relevance of the techniques and skills, but the attitude of the craftsman and ordinary people. Undoubtedly, we are not concerned too much about traditional wares and even ignore the beauty of them. The simplicity and practicality of Song ware reflect that the Song was a time when aesthetic feelings, social life and religious sensibilities were truly harmonious.

The manifestation of Song wares is in conformity with the principle of Everyday Aesthetics. While the high level of art and craft can be found from the emperor's treasure, it is also vital that we should be able to examine and enjoy the proofs of the culture of the ordinary people, as a sign of Everyday Aesthetics. The bulk of Song wares have been found from folk kilns but not royal kilns.

Influence

The beautiful folk crafts indicate that craftsman respected the natural materials and natural processes; they are more religious and authentic. Also, beautiful crafts that have been everywhere in the society indicates ordinary people appreciated the craftsmanship and their quality of life was high. Because of this they would look to obtain high quality objects for their daily use.

However, many scholars pessimistically consider that we can never surpass the achievement of Song wares in terms of the technologic and aesthetic. We have to face the facts that traditional craftsmanship is not as crucial as it was in the ancient time.

"The long woes of his country have robbed him of the zest for the meaning of life. He has become modern that is to say, old and disenchanted. He lost that sublime faith in illusions which constitutes the eternal youth and vigor of the poets and ancients." (Okakura, 1906, p. 40)

But a straw shows which way the wind blows, I am optimistic based on what I have seen. I grew up in Hangzhou where the capital city of Southern Song dynasty was in 1132. Longquan celadon¹ ware has been regarded as the best ware for tea because its blue glaze enhances the tea color. But from my perspective, not only the glaze but some types of forms have been handed down. I stayed in the small town for one month in July of 2011, the summer before I came to Helsinki, which left beautiful memories.

Having observed the old kiln works as being the same as a thousand years ago, I worked with people who are highly skilled at throwing, glazing, and firing. The elaborate division of labor indicates the highly mature handicraft industry since the Song dynasty. It feels that everything hasn't been as an enormous improvement as other industries, but just preserves the traditions. We don't have to deny that celadon wares are not mainstream products in the modern environment, but the humble and unadorned is providing a choice to live with, that is the mental attitude toward both art and life. It presents the huge challenge of reassessing at the most fundamental level our attitude toward life, the life of aesthetic, and our inward feelings. I expect Song aesthetic could revive and grow, which does not mean that Song wares became more valuable in the auction, but that people start to relish the artless and the mundane. This then extends into all aspects of life and has the potential to bring a better harmony between the spiritual beings and material world.

Everyday aesthetics, which we can see from Song wares, is capable of rekindling the awareness of our appreciation of beauty, which should be influenced by the cultural inheritance and ideology. As it offers an alternative approach to designing with humility and sincerity.

1. Longquan celadon(龙泉青瓷 in Chinese) Celadon Stoneware and Porcelain is easily one of the most popular and long-lived ceramics styles ever produced in China. Its Chinese name, Qingci(青瓷), translates as "greenish Porcelain." Longquan County in Zhejiang Province is considered the most important producing region for Celadon Stoneware and Porcelain. (S.J.Vainker, 1995)



Figure 10
Place: Longquan, Zhejiang,
China Date: 1200-
1279(made)
Artist/Maker: Unknown



Figure 11 I stayed in the small town
for one month in July of 2011, the
summer before I came to Helsinki,
which left beautiful memories. In
one small workshop, craftsman is
transferring the ceramics.

Figure 12 Simple celadon bowl has
been used for severing the tomatoes.
Soft and warm blue glaze works very
well with the red color.





Figure 13: the black lacquer surface

I became conscious that my thoughts have so many layers, which ends up expressing itself in a Westernism and Modernism as the out layer. But when you peel it away, the essence of my thought is oriental and traditional. After examining the Song aesthetic, I found I have been able actually to peel off layers, just focus on myself.

A personal note in summer 2015, Helsinki, Finland

Black

It feels as though the images are becoming radiant the longer I stay distant from home. Reflecting on my childhood memories, it started to seem apparent why I have strong interests on black.

----A personal note, 2011, First winter in Finland

Is black a color? It is like a no-color, yet at the same time we can also conceive of it as a color. The primary purpose of talking about the black mindset in Oriental culture is not merely looking at the traditional art but seeking for an alternative subjective view of abstraction awareness of nature world.

Sensibility and power of black have become evocative dynamism of my life. Ink(墨) Black is perhaps one of the most familiar colors in my first 25-year-life. The character for the ink(“墨”) is composed of black(“黑”) and soil(“土”) due to the earthly origins of the dark mineral used in its production. Since the first time dipping a brush in ink, my life has relevance with Chinese calligraphy. Ink, at that time, became the sign of my childhood. But writing Chinese calligraphy and at the same time I was exploring the different features of ink: running or coagulated, wet or dry, and fine or rough. The more I gained skills and knowledge on the processes as well as its social impacts. I became more sensitive to the quality of color itself.

Another aspect that I found inspiring is the black and white seen in Chinese painting(水墨画in Chinese). When different amounts of water dilute the ink, it appears vibrant various grey colors. That is applied to any other aesthetics of Chinese art, which is called Chinese painting. In my view, different from western sketch, which is also only use one color, Chinese painting is more abstract and free. To comprehend of Chinese painting

Influence

helps to understand the profound mean of black in Chinese color theory. Consequently, the best Chinese painting, which balances dense and light, and contain black and white, could be considered as colorful. Because in terms of imagination, the colorless is superior to colorful, which leads people into space. Also, black is the elementary, semantically and visually is mostly every color, when it remains different chromatic sensations. I believe Oriental is born with color sensibility, which likes their mentality.

"Through painting landscapes I have grown to love my motherland even more and wish to be forever intoxicated in her embrace."

-----Wu Guanzhong (Guanzhong, ei pvm)

Art is an integral part of life as it is the way we feel about our environment. The scope of expression from Chinese painting, especially landscape painting, stresses a state of mind called immersing yourself in nature. Therefore, for me calligraphy can be seen as a microcosm but painting as a macrocosm. As a practice, I have painted and understood the Finnish nature environment and find the flexibilities of a Chinese black aesthetic that produces simplicity and subtlety. While, if connect ink black and life in Finland, especially in dark winter, the mindset of winter can enable the viewer to transcend the superficial limitations of the colors and light depicted in the mind and enter the boundless time and space beyond to get a metaphysical glimpse of life, nature, and the universe. Trials of few surface work that I utilised the different colorless approaches, which based on Chinese black mindset, to describe the extreme and abstraction of Finnish nature.

Personally, the abstract awareness and perceiving the invisible from visible is what I consider important in my work. In terms of the thesis development, to endow the notion of conscious and unconscious will be the main field of exploration.

The mission from this point onwards is to investigate how those previous influences could be reflected upon my creation of the thesis work. I have already found one method of using lacquer as means of expressing natural abstraction and color sensibility that emerged from my subjective value. The question remains in the inspirations from traditional Chinese way of tea, and the adaptations to the modern life, and I would like to examine my understanding about that in the next chapter.



Figure 14 name: Trace, Watercolor, Wu Guanzhong 2002

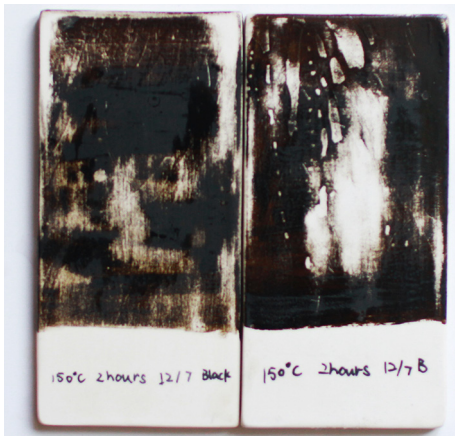


Figure 15 My first few explorations with lacquer on the ceramic surface, which remind me the northern light.



Foam 2015 Summer, Helsinki

T e a b r e a k

Tea Break

I have attempted to understand the philosophy of tea and the aesthetic of tealism, as the purity and harmony have been inculcated when people talk about tea culture. But back to everyday life, a cup of tea simply takes you on a sensual journey: sight, touch, smell, taste, and feeling. Just Drink.

Tea, a cup of imagination

When I was young, tea was the beverage. In my family, my father drank a large number of Longjing tea (a variety of pan-roasted green tea from my hometown Hangzhou), but not too much tea was allowed to me as a kid. However, all my memory about this tea is the Longjing Village where plants the tea (Figure 17). Upon entering the tea fields, just found myself fascinated by the breathtaking views. Tea tree are planted following the hills that look like natural green weaved blankets. Perhaps my bud is not sensitive enough to distinguish the tea in different standards, but my imagination brings me to a journey to where the tea is planted. After I had left home for many years whenever I drink the Longjing tea, I was back to the tea fields. When talking about the “taste of a region,” a plant’s “sense of place,” tea lovers often refer to a tea’s terroir, a concept borrowed from the world of wine, where specific valleys and slopes are credited with producing a distinctive taste through their natural and manmade geology. (Anon., 2014)

Unlike other agricultural products, tea is the wisdom of civilization. Soil composition, weather condition, altitude, and local ecosystem characterize a tea’s unique gene, but accurate processing gives a soul to tea. Brew a pot of tea, constitute the idyllic scenery in my mind. An ancient Chinese poet by the name of Tao Yuanming says aptly in one of his famous poems, “Plucking chrysanthemums under the eastern hedge, I calmly view the southern hills.” For instance, Longjing tea leaves are roasted early to stop the natural oxidation process, and then fired and heated in big iron pans by human’s hand without any protection until they completely dry out. No matter you have the knowledge of a specific tea or not, you taste bud should tell you the unique character of it, and bring your imagination that field of tea.

I believe that study a new tea likes to read legends from it and to make a friend with it. The enjoyment of tea, like the enjoyment of the moon, the snow, and the flowers, must take place in the proper company.

Tea wares, a history book of folk crafts

The preparation and drinking of tea encompasses a colossal amount of history relating to customs, medicine, literature, art, crafts, trade and industry. (Valkonen, 2008, p. 9) Regarding tea wares, the carrier of tea, it has long been in philosophy of Chinese that “beautiful food is not as good as beautiful wares”. As different ways of drinking naturally bring about corresponding tea wares. These tea wares, as the most important carriers of crafts, especially ceramics, development passage of tea culture, provide significant proof for us to study the crafts history from ancient China. The reason I focus on tea wares not rather than other fields is that tea wares stand for Everyday aesthetics, as they reveal the sincere attitude to ordinary life.

The China National Tea Museum is also located in my hometown. Among the collections of the museum, tea wares have the one of most significant roles to introduce the tea culture from China. What I learned from the museum is that the Tang Dynasty and Song Dynasty were the first and second peaks in ceramic development history in China. Meanwhile, the way of tea and the techniques of producing tea wares had achieved tremendous advance.

Tea time, a fusion of culture

Tea, worked as a culture envoy, is both impartial and universal. The history of tea is long and complex, spreading across multiple cultures over the span of thousands of years. Tea is now enthusiastically consumed all over Europe, and in some countries it has become a national drink.

But in Nordic countries people have very heavy habits about coffee. Therefore, it is hard to find some typical tea cultures that are developed from themselves. People are following the British way of tea or just using modern tea bags. But still, I found the differences from teawares. For example, Nordic ceramic teapot, in term of the size and form, is bigger and more simple, and the teapot sometimes includes in flier part, which is also made from porcelain. But British teapot is always more elegant and ornamental. The reason is a complex, but apparently, the way of tea in Nordic countries is more casual and unfastidious.

Refer to the influence more directly from Asian tea culture, I interview few tea stores in Helsinki. Théhuone is the first a Scandinavian fresh and customer-oriented tea house in Helsinki, where they do not only provide to local people good tea and but give the answer to a good way of tea. “I found people who searched for the good tea they can only find something from Stockmann.” When Nina, the owner of Théhuone, talked about her intentions of this tea shop seven years ago, she said: “I noticed that nowhere to find good tea in Helsinki.” Later on, she and her sister opened Théhuone in downtown Helsinki. “We are constantly seeking new and interesting tea around the world, and re-

Tea break

cently my favorite tea Taiwanese high mountain oolong.” I found Nina imported plenty of Chinese, Japanese and Korean tea, and as well as some oriental tea wares, like Yixing teapot, Japanese tea bowl and tea whipper. Nina also mentioned that Finnish people who have problems with coffee finds the solution from tea, they may find the solutions from tea. But after getting into learning more about tea, they also have an awareness of good tea.

In 2013, two Chinese girls Peng and Xinyuan opened the door of their Teemaa tea store in Helsinki. I interviewed them in last winter. They are just about my ages and also their store is also not mature enough. But I appreciate with their vision, as they wish to provide a place only serving for good Chinese tea. They have selected a place of origin, and impart knowledge and appreciation of contemporary Chinese tea culture. Gradually, the tea house is gathering small groups of tea enthusiast and cultivate them a deeper appreciation for tea. From observing their way of serving the tea, I noticed that even though brewing the tea with Yixing teapot, but they simplify and adapt the way of tea. First of all, present tea wares in a wooden tray rather than a traditional tea tray. And also reduce the amount of tea accessories and replace the small tea cups with slightly bigger one. Resulted from the owner want to focus on serve tea to individual customer. People from Finland would prefer to order different types of tea for individual rather than sharing one pot of tea as it is in the Kongfu tea. Refer to an individual customer, who pays more attention to the taste of tea, severing tea with bigger cup and small tea pitcher (公道杯 gongdaobei in Chinese) appropriately offers the experience of Chinese tea.

Some basic Traditional tea tools and equipment (Figure 19)

- 1.brewing vessel,Yixing teapot, porcelain teapot
- 2.tea pitcher
- 3.hot water kettle
- 4.brewing tray
- 5.tea towel or tea cloth
- 6.teaspoon (tea pick) for clearing the teapot spout, and clearing tea leaves etc.
- 7.tea cups with plates ,traditionally tree cups are used in most instances
- 8.tea strainer
- 9.tea holder, tea leaf holder for weighing and dispensing
- 10.tea basin or bowl used as the receptacle for used tea leaves and refuse water

Having investigated in the past and present of tea and having considered how to bridge different habits and cultures of tea, I have concerted different influences and my ideas to a design of tea set. In the following, I would explain my design concepts and spread out material explorations and making processes, as well as the summary of my distinctive experience.

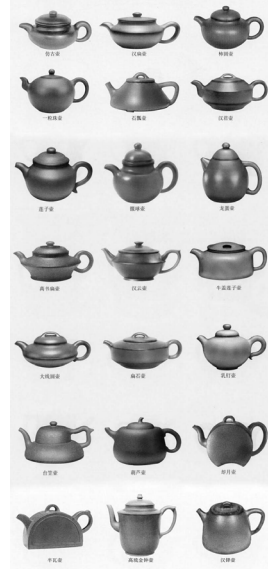
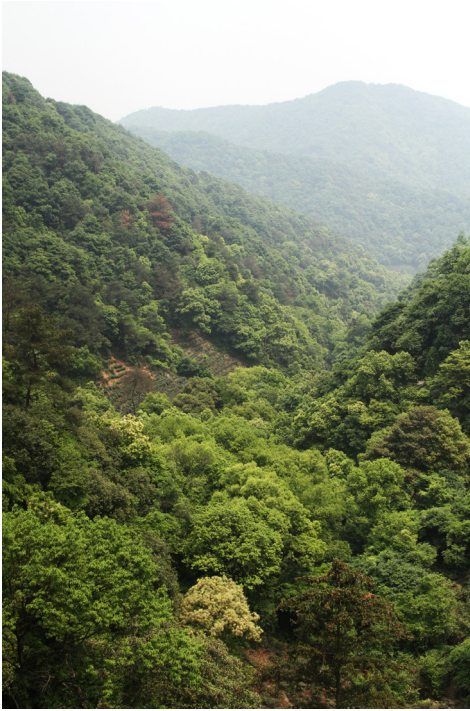
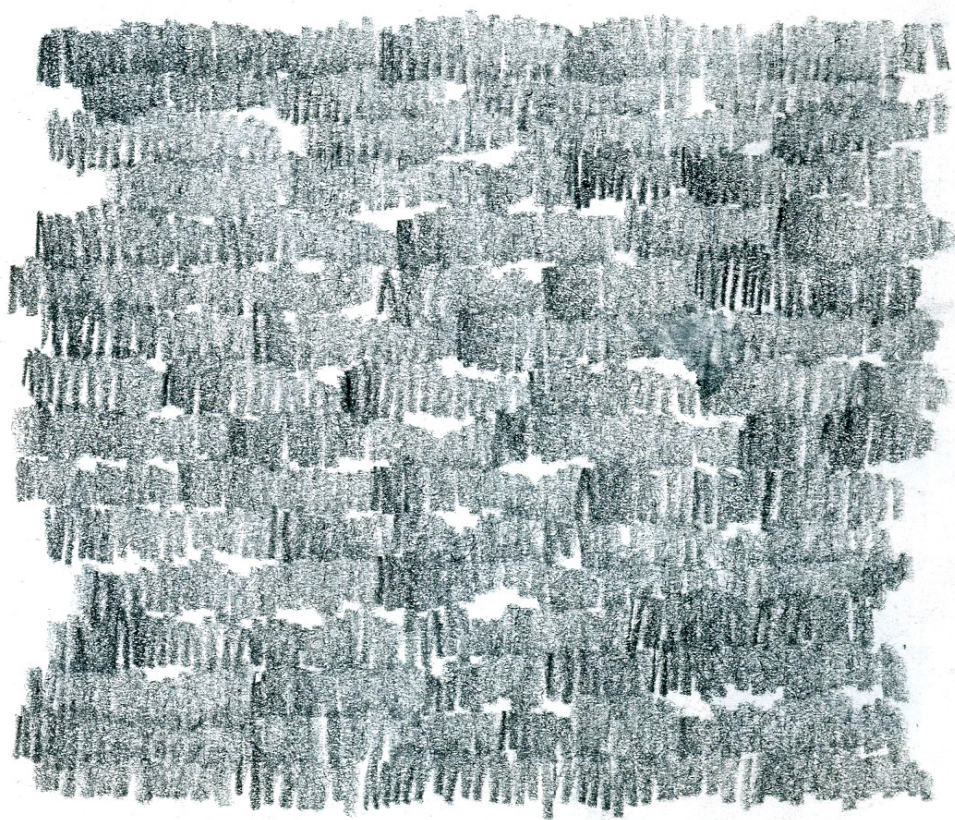


Figure 16: Longjing tea fields.
Photo in April of 2014

Figure 17: Different forms of
Yixing tea pot.

Figure 18: Traditional Kungfu
Tea tools and equipment





Shadow 2015 Spring, Helsinki

Materials and Production

Materials & Production

1. Work diary

20.4.2014- visited Yangzhou Lacquer Ware Factory

30.4.2014- visited Yixing Teapot Factory

29.6.2014- my first lacquer test piece has done in Helsinki

9-10.2014- kept on lacquer testing and chose the way of lacquer

09.02.2015- came back Stockholm furniture fair and started working with the first prototype.

12.02.2015- made my first teapot body and tested for the size and capacity.

19.02.2015- more test about the handles and spouts and got more bisque fired pieces

21.02.2015- worked with the lid on plaster, and decided to make a step inside of the opening part to fit the lid.

23.02.2015- finished first set of teapot that included a teapot and tree tea cups.

27.02.2015- evaluated the teapot in Teemaa teahouse interviewed the owner more about Kongfu tea.

02.03.2015- worked with amplified model and made the mold out of from it

04.03.2015- the first casting mold was done

05-14.03.2015- casted the body of the teapot and tested with several of handle and spouts.

11.03.2015- The toughs from making the teapot

I have spent a month in the ceramic workshop making my teapot. I remember two years ago when we were making some big plates for a restaurant project. Lecturer Nathalie Lahdenmäki told us the plate was one of the most difficult items to make. Although I now think that designing and making a teapot is far more difficult. The challenge with the plate is only to keep the form in the firing process, even if this is not achieved the plate is still functional and can be used to serve food. But a teapot, if there is even a little mistake it is difficult to serve the tea and you would discard it immediately.

I struggled to make the teapot both functional and aesthetic. But it didn't work out. At that time I came across Prof. Tapio Yli-Viikari, we had a conversation about craftsmen and teapots. During our conversation, he showed me a variety of teapots. When we went through the Yixing teapots from his collection I was once again inspired.

Prof. Tapio said "With this style of teapot, only when the upper part of the handle smoothly extends out of the pail, the teapot can visually impress us; also only when the upper part of the handle is more slender than the lower part, the teapot can impress us with the harmony of the whole body and the delicacy, "We often hear that a Yixing teapot is 'flavor connection'. In other words, it means the accuracy level of the appreciation of lines on the pot parts and pot body. If the place where they link together is incorrect, the "flavor" of the Yixing teapot will be broken up. Otherwise, the whole flavor of the Yixing teapot will be connected and then forms a circle. To a large extent, the question of its flavor is a tough task to test the producers' making skills. Our hands reach the handgrip, and then to the pot, spout coherently."

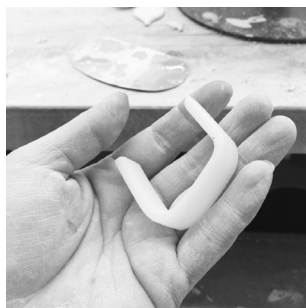
The craftsman is not only repeating the making processes every day but making improvements with each practice. Consequently, their new work is becoming superior to the old one all the time, as also every time the experience is felt more deeply than it was the last time. All the details are improving with the passage of time. I think their hands better know what beauty is after a period of time.

I do not study traditional Chinese ceramic skills and Knowledge, therefore I feel I am compelled to look at Chinese crafts from the perspective of an outsider. It means that I can keep a unique perspective with regard to travelling between east and west, given me the ability to seek common ground while also seeing the differences.

I sum up my experience of learning ceramics in different countries like Finland, China and Japan, as that the Chinese or Oriental ideology of crafts is based on the sufficient amount of practice, specifically, an apprentice would gain awareness rather than knowledge. For instance, from the school's education, in China and Japan, students have to spend couple of months time only on one specific technique like throwing or painting, both teachers and masters believe that students would be never qualified until their hands acquire something.

Hence, I decided to make one or two teapots per day and enhance my awareness of good teapots from each of them.

Materials & Production



1 2 3
4 5
6 7 8
9 10

27.03.2015- spent a couple of days to make my second and, of course, better casting mold, modified few details to achieve better surface and form.(picture 1-3)

02.04.2015-made the plates for the tea set.

04.04-2015-started lacquer work again.

11.04.2015-finally chose the handle and spout.(picture 4) used 3d printed handle as a model for making the casting mold

30.04-15.5.2015-lacquer on different materials testing

18.05.2015-decided to make a glass tray when I have done a lot of lacquer testing on the glass.

22.05.2015-made my tea caddy and glass casting mold

24.05.2015-did hot pour casted my glass tray, under the help of Lecturer Kirsti Taiviola (picture 9&10)

08.06.2015-wood firing (picture 7)

17.06.2015- the last working day before the middle summer holiday.

28.05.2015-glass pieces were cooling down to the room temperature but found both of them were over filled. I discussed with Lecturer Kirsti Taiviola and made the decision to cut the thick one but preserve the thinner one. Soon, I did the cold glass work to grind the edge. 02.06.2015- received the lacquer brush from Japan.

05-18.06.2015- lacquering

16.8.2015- the new cup and serving cup came

26.8.2015- made the wooden tray for the tea set

2. Lacquering¹

2.1 background

Every object has a skin. Thick or thin, smooth or rough, porous or impermeable, the skin is the line between the hidden inside and the outside we experience.

When I first learned about this material, doubtless, it surprised me by its magical characteristic. Hold a piece of lacquerware, you see only lacquer material as a skin of the object. But underneath of the lacquer the body is possibly made of wood, metal, ceramic, bamboo and certain different materials. Thus, it is much easy to understand the characteristic of lacquer as like a skin of a creation. Lacquer shows the outside of an object, but it is a carrier of aesthetics. This is a value of life aesthetics, which contains both its nature and culture.

Lacquer is the gift from nature.

First of all, lacquer is natural, which is the sap from lacquer tree (*Rhus Vrniciflua*). And the lacquer tree is to be found mostly in Southeast Asia and it prefers a warm climate. This mysterious material is running out and being collected when lateral incisions are made into the bark (Figure 19). The sap is first white or grayish in color about the consistency of molasses. On exposure to the air, it turns yellow-brown and then black. After being removed physical impurities, it is slightly heated over a slow fire or exposed to the sunshine, stirred to evaporate excess moisture for couples of hours. Raw lacquer is comprised of 60-65% pyrocatechol derivatives, 20-25% water, 8% carbohydrates and 2% glycoproteins. Certain mineral and metallic colorants add into finished liquids to make for different color lacquers. For instance, Iron oxide black (3-5%) is the most common pigments used.

Does lacquer highly toxic? I have been asked that thousands of time during my thesis project. Lacquer will cause a severe skin reaction in over 90% people. While only a few people have a natural immunity and others can build up immunity increasingly over time. I got my first allergic reaction in June 2015 after I worked half year with lacquer. Itchy red patches of the skin occur several days, but less reaction and lasting shorter time in the second and third times. I am not afraid of that because I know it is the rule of nature, as a sap, lacquer has the mission of protecting the tree. However, please do not fear for touching the exquisite lacquerware. Once polymerized it is no longer toxic.

¹ Lacquering: the method of coating lacquer or gold and silver by using brush, including "lacquer base colour", "covering the half-transparent lacquer" and "single lacquer directly coated on the base body" as stated in Lacquer Decoration Record. (Qiao, 2004)

Lacquer is the protection of skin that is the largest organ that protects the creation.

The only one existed ancient lacquer book is called 髹饰录 (the book is written by Huangdacheng from Ming dynasty(1567-1572)). “髹” is a pictographic character that the upper part means brush and lower part mean decoration. But I believe lacquer first appeared not for decoration but more about function. The oldest existing lacquer ware is a red lacquer wood bowl, which was unearthed by archeologists in an excavation in the Neolithic Hemudu remains in Yuyao, Zhejiang Province. It is estimated that the bowl was made 7,000 years ago. Because a wooden bowl that hasn't be coated by lacquer can be served for few year before it cracks or decays, but a lacquer coating bowl can be preserved for few centuries even thousands of years. Lacquer contents resin has been regarded as an insulation, is heat and acid-resisting and rot and waterproof.

While lacquer ware, which uses many layers of wafer-thin, semi-transparent lacquer to create a surface of almost mystical radiance and sensual depth. Lacquer's hardness and durability make it an excellent protective coating for any object that will be used continually over a long period.

All natural lacquer wares aren't only healthy, practical, and durable, but also incredibly beautiful.

It takes the knowledge and care of a farmer to harvest the sap, the skill and precision of a craftsman to strengthen and form the objects, in addition to the soul and patience of an artist to bring beauty to each individual piece. This is why every piece of natural lacquer products is so special. Lacquer ware with elaborate surface coating requires labor-intensive manufacturing, which has two distinct paths pictorial decoration and carving of lacquer. Although lacquer is used in many Asian cultures, the art of carving lacquer is unique to China. I was luckily to visit Yangzhou lacquer ware factory (in Jiangsu Province), and that is the one just famous as its carved lacquer².

Although I got some contacts with Yangzhou lacquer ware factory, finally I did not choose it as my method (carved lacquer). The reason is a complex. First of all, I am not able to spend more than a year time in my thesis project. Moreover, during the development of my ideas of lacquer, I am not confident enough to create a modern appearance to this extremely ornamental technique. More importantly than all of these, my hands gave the best answer to me, to use raising and covering technique, that is because they chose the special feeling of touching the fine lacquer surface.

² Like all lacquer objects, carved pieces have a base that is usually made of turned wood: it is the lacquer that is worked and not the underlying material. In the carved-lacquer technique, multiple layers (often thirty or thirty-five, but at times up to two hundred) are applied onto a substructure in the shape of a box or dish, exposed to air and dried, and carved to create lush geometric motifs, engaging scenes of figures enjoying nature, and lively birds flitting among flowers. Yangzhou is also famous as its lacquerwares inlaid with tiny cuts of mother-of-pearl. Other famous lacquer cities also have their special and unique lacquerwares, like bodiless lacquerware of Fuzhou (Fujian Province), raising and covering lacquer of Pingyao(Jiangxi Province), and pineapple lacquer of Tunxi (Anhui Province) (Qiao, 2004)

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Figure 19 How does the raw lacquer be collected from the tree.

Figure 20 Traditional craved lacquer ware. Ming Dynasty.

Figure 21 Red lacquer in Yangzhou Lacquer factory

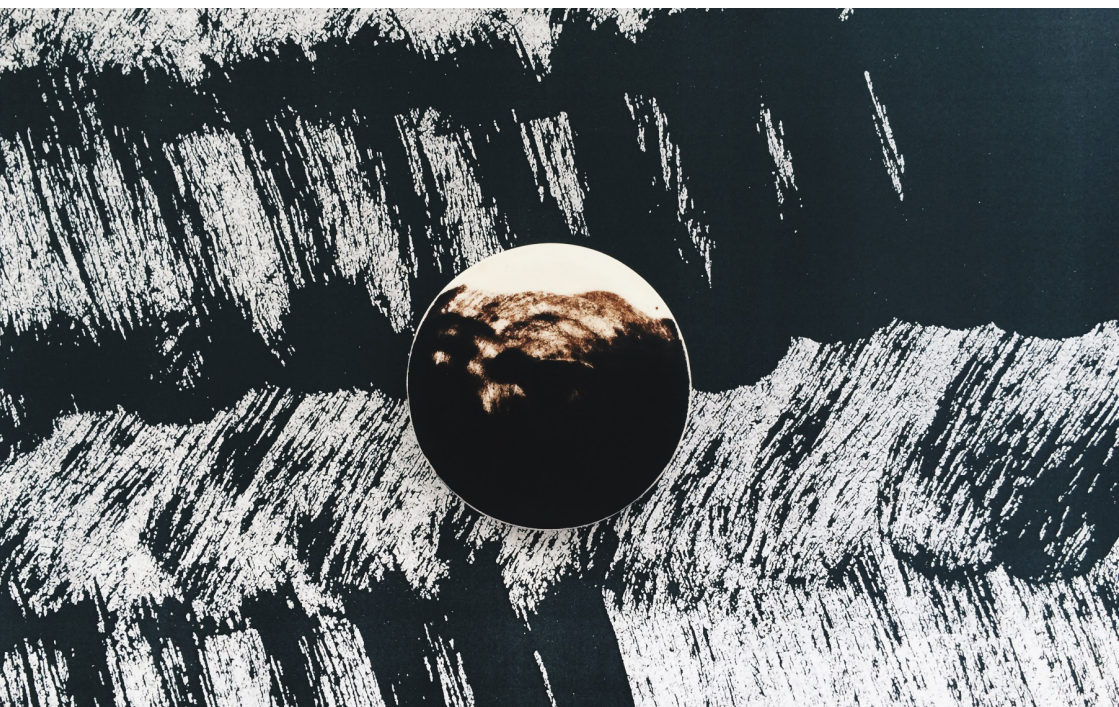
Figure 22 The special lacquer drying room

Figure 23&24 A craftsman is craving the surface of the big screen.

Figure 25 A craftsman from Yangzhou Lacquer factory is craving a piece that has more than 1000 layers of lacquer. Normally, it takes two years for lacquering, half year for craving and another half year for drying. So craved lacquer is the most time-consuming work among all the lacquer wares.







2.2 *My practice*

As I mentioned before, I started lacquer testing quite blindly. Of course, it is not meant I have not done any research and background knowledge study. The lack of basic knowledge and specialized guidance, on the other, creates many possibilities. I didn't follow the principles and found out my way from the mistakes.

The specificity of my practice is particularly caused by both objective environment and subjective consciousness. While, lacquer sap itself cannot become utensil independently. As I mentioned, the body or carrier can be made from many different materials. However, my base bone of lacquer is ceramic, or more specifically porcelain. Even though it is not a new material for lacquer, the rarity of porcelain enhanced the difficulty of my practice. I gradually find my approach of lacquering, as the quality of black lacquer that has tonal and textural differences, and the mottled parts may evoke strong feelings such as dark and mystical.

Lacquer

I bought few different types of lacquer from China. For example, raw lacquer (生漆 shengqi in Chinese) is the basic unprocessed lacquer with some impurities filtered out. Raw lacquer has a water content of around 25% and appears in a light brown color. And the processed form (光漆 guangqi in Chinese) is the lacquer that has been exposed under sunlight or artificial light until water evaporating. I used most of the black lacquer (黑推光 heituiguang in Chinese), which is a kind of processed lacquer contents 3% iron oxide, the raw lacquer is from the tree planted in Chengkou, Chongqing, China. When I interviewed the lacquer master from Yangzhou lacquer factory, he talked about: "raw lacquer from different places of China content various amounts of urushiol and laccase. Understand the characteristic and mix materials with few different lacquers from different places.

Brush

Different brushes are used for the different applications of lacquer techniques. For applying the basic layers of lacquer, a brush of hair from Asian female who grow up in the seaside are the prime tools. This traditional brush is still wildly used in this field. Because this brush has been made by specific techniques that have been fastened to rectangle wood. Like other tools from the craftsman, lacquer brush has its individuality for different lacquer maker. And also has been treasured by them, which lasts quite a long time and may, in fact, be passed down one generation to the next.

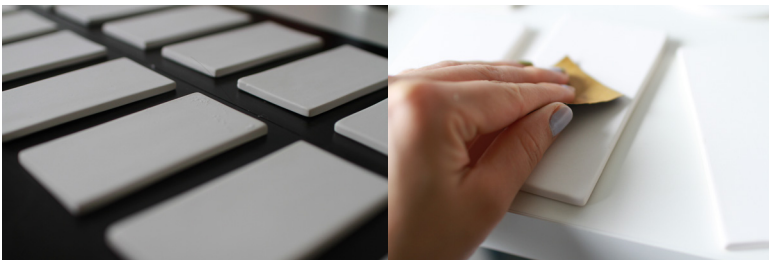
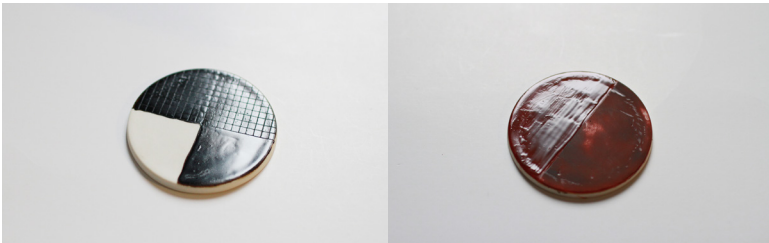
My practice of lacquer, at the beginning, tested with alternative brushes from both China and Finland, from nylon brushed to wool brushes and ink brushes for oil painting brushes. I did not notice the significant difference among different brushes (pictrue in the next page) but finally chose the most traditional one. Gradually, I am aware of the strong point of distinct lacquer brush, as its hair gives appropriate elasticity to apply the lacquer as thin as possible. Also, as a result of the special cut top (brush 5).

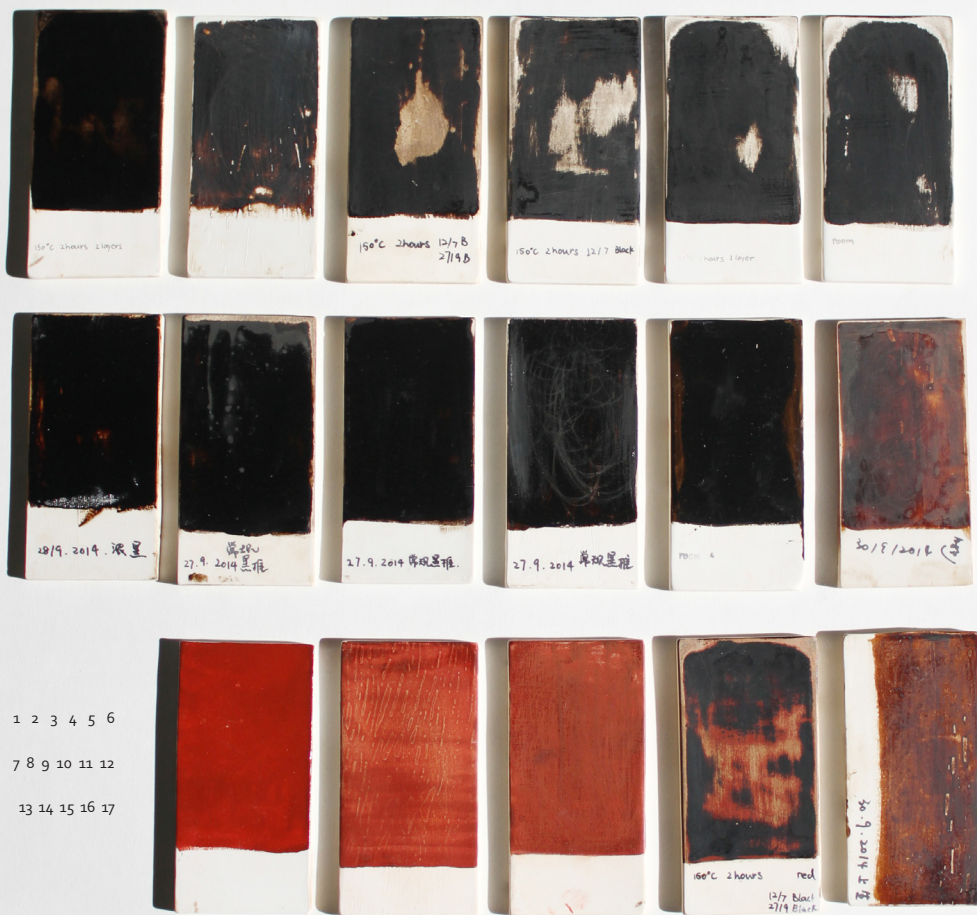
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Treasure the brush: It is about how to clean and preserve the brush. When the new brush arrives, clean it with a small amount of lacquer with a specific comb: apply the lacquer on and comb it away for four or five times. Every time after finishing the lacquering, use oil to clean the brush until the oil (plant oil) gets clear. And leave some clean oil on the hair and wrap with the freshness-keeping film. Remove the oil with turpentine before using the brush next time.

Drying methods

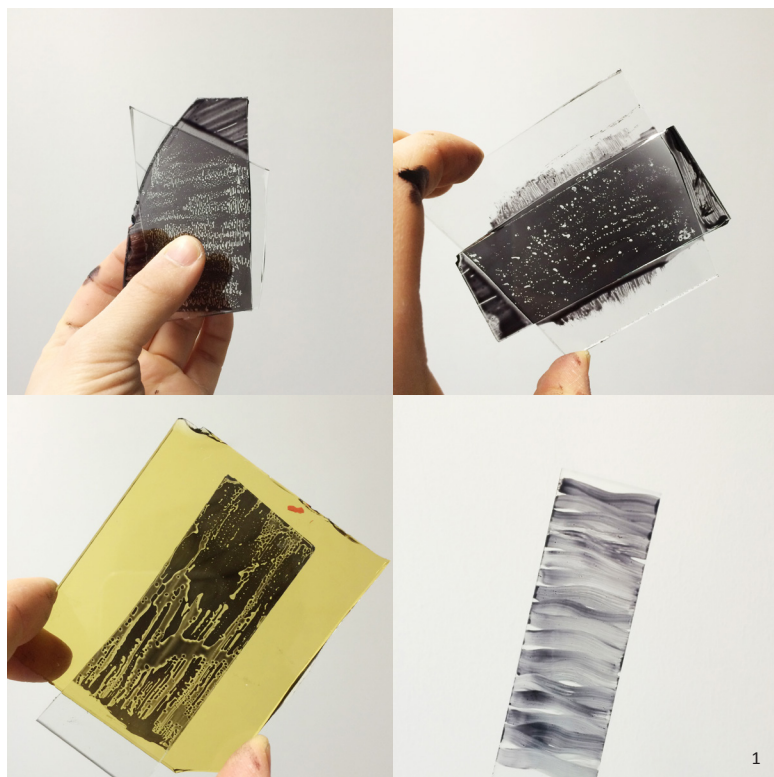
Dry the lacquer is one of the vital steps in all the lacquer processes. Traditional drying cabinet provides a humid, dust-free atmosphere that promotes the hardening of the





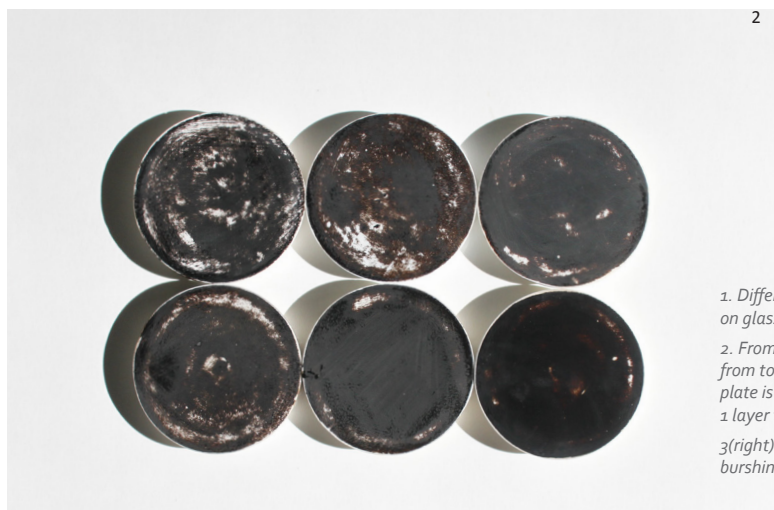
1. black lacquer(黑推光)/one layer/ without polishing /150 °C for 2 hours
2. black lacquer(黑推光)/ two layers/ polished /150 °C for 2 hours
- 3-6 normal black lacquer(黑推光)/ three layers/ polished /150 °C for 2 hours
7. condensed black lacquer(浓缩黑漆)/one layer/ without polishing /150 °C for 2 hours
- 8&9. normal black lacquer(常规雅黑)/ two layers/without polishing /150 °C for 2 hours
- 10&11. normal black lacquer(常规雅黑)/ two layers/ polished /150 °C for 2 hours
- 12&17. clear raw lacquer(上涂生漆)/one layer/ without polishing /150 °C for 2 hours
13. red lacquer(红推光) /one layer/ without polishing /150 °C for 2 hours
- 14&15 red lacquer(红推光) /one layer/ polished /150 °C for 2 hours
16. the first layer with red lacquer(红推光) and the second layer with black lacquer(黑推光) / polished /150 °C for 2 hours

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1

2



1. Different lacquer testing on glass surface.
2. From left to right and from top to bottom: ceramic plate is applied lacquer from 1 layer to 6 layers.
- 3(right) . The process of burshing lacquer



3

lacquer. Lacquer Drying is time-consuming, for example in Yangzhou lacquer factory, lacquer makers can only do maximum two layers of lacquer in spring and summer but maybe only one layer during winter. Yangzhou city and other many lacquer cities are subtropical monsoon climate, with plenty of rainfall, the average temperature around 15 degrees Celsius. Additionally, the special lacquer room (Figure 22) has been built for creating a suitable and steady temperature and humidity: the wall has been fixed with wet straw that provides the moisture in the required range. Usually, drying cabinet should have humidity around approximately 60% and 80%, and room temperature above 20 degree Celsius. However, severe challenges happened in Finland. I attempted to dry lacquer with room temperature, but it usually prolongs up to few days. Based on some of the references, I found the way to speed up the drying process: "Practice indicates, when rise the temperature to 100 Celsius degree and keep warm, lacquer dries over 8 hours; 120 Celsius degree then 5 hours; 150 Celsius degree then 3 hours and 180 Celsius degree then 1 hour. If heat warms up too fast, lacquer surface would be crazing and bubbling." (Shiguang, 2004)

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Process of lacquering

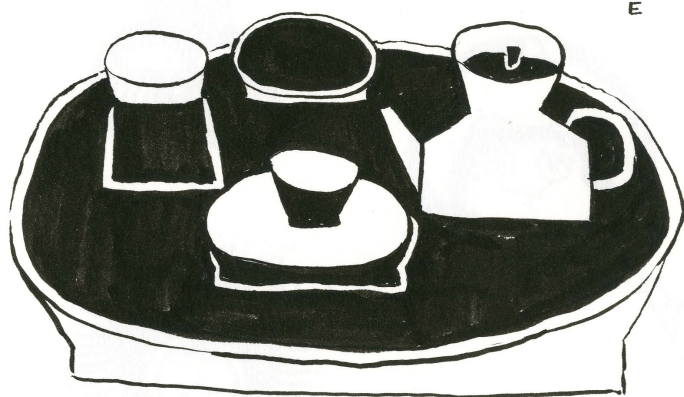
Haveing studied from the mistake and experience, I developed my way of lacquer.

- 1.After making the base body from porcelain, polish the surface if required.
- 2.Brush the surface thinly with lacquer,
- 3.Put pieces into a disposable baking box, cover with tinfoil, that in case of gathering the dust from kiln
- 4.Put the boxes with pieces inside into the kiln, and heat them up to 130 Celsius degree with the speed of 40 Celsius degree per hour, and then hold the temperature for 2 hours
- 5.Unload the pieces when the kiln cools down and polish the surface started with 200# sandpaper
- 6.Repeat step2-5 until the surface becomes smooth and flat, and gradually raise the fineness of the sandpaper from 200# up to 1000#. Most of pieces have done 6-7 layers of lacquer.
- 7.Finish the surface with 1000#- 3000# sandpaper.
- 8.Burnish the surface with the mixture from oil and Tin oxide.



*Wash the brush with colza oil many times until the oil becomes clear.
(other plant oil is also possible)*

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Sketches and development of form and details.

3. Teapot and tea set

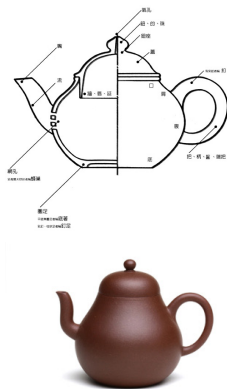
3.1 Background

The study of the characteristics of models to be of great importance. In creating the model, I studied its ergonomics from drawings to prototypes. In addition to a harmonious from language, I sought the best solutions for its special function. I tested few types of handles and spouts to the teapot. Having studied from Yixing teapot:

These should be in balance. Their relationship and construction must be clear and practical. The lid must fit, not jammed, or rattle, and it must be deep-seated and firm- not falls off easily and breaks. Spouts and handles are individually made and then be connected to the body. This link must be smooth, and the transition between the pair and the spout should be appropriate. Together they must feel good, the spout allowing the water to flow freely, and the handle provides a friendly grip and balanced leverage and control.

-The requirements of a good Yixing teapot (Xiutang, 2010)

Accordingly, the teapot is a possessed of practicability, craftsmanship, and artistry and is a worthy field of academic research, in-depth study, and appreciation. The teapot is a result of applied art. It must be practical, pour well, felt good, look good and balance pleasantly in the hand.



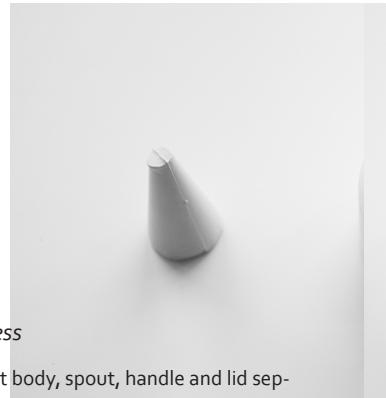
The study on different handles and spouts.

3.2 Concept

I didn't plan to design and make a teapot in the early days. I sketched randomly, meanwhile, experimented with lacquer and clay. When I reviewed my sketches one day, suddenly, was captured by one idea among hundreds of sketches. I was aware of an impulsion, and could not wait to make it come true. The idea is functionally inspired by Traditional Chinese Kongfu tea set, but visually presented in a modern form. Personally, the sketch provided me refreshment for more modern sensibilities. However, the form did not spring from the artistic idea alone. It is also the creation of my hands-on sense of touch and visual impression. I explored the harmony between the idea and material, form and execution, form and function.

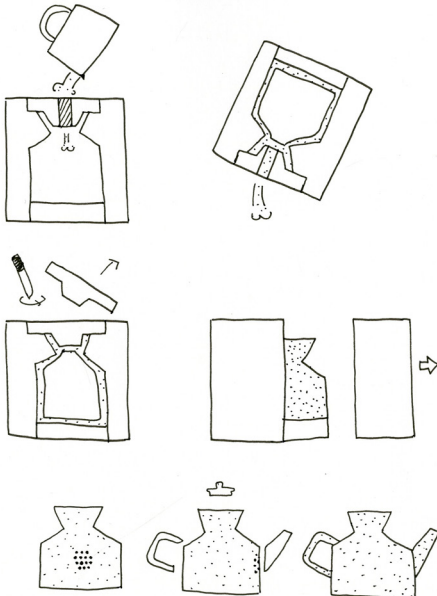
Together with the teapot I designed and made few different items to match with it: a small cup, a big cup, the plate for cup (to put underneath), a big plate for tea dessert, a serving cup (gongdao mug) and a tea caddy. Having Considered as a tea set, two different sizes and forms cup provides a choice according to different personal requires. The small cup is suitable for the traditional way of tea, but big cup offers an alternative way of tea, that is more relax and easy to approach.

1 2
3 4
5 6
7



3.3 Teapot process

1. Cast the teapot body, spout, handle and lid separately (picutre 2)
2. Take all the pieces out of the mold and wait about half an hour to one hour, until the clay becomes a little bit hard. (picture 3)
3. Cut the spout so that it could match with the teapot, and mark the position of spout on the teapot body (picture 5)
4. Drill the holes in the marked areas with a special tool (it is a traditional Chinese ceramic hole-maker, which is made from copper).(picture 4)
4) Those holes are used for filtering tealeaves, as a traditional Yixing teapot.
5. Attach the spout onto that area with the same kind of slip clay.(picture 7)
6. Attach the handle to the body.





Comments & Evaluations

During development of production part, I have attempted to improve my design by listening to others rather than merely my opinions. As a result, I visited Teemaa Tea House many times. As tea masters, Peng and Xinyuan's comments have a great study value. From observing their way of serving tea and listening to their feedback after using my tea set, I learnt the tea serving should be suited to a particular purpose and meet individual requirements. Consequently, I made some modification in my design.

The first time, on 27th of February I went there my biscuit fired teapot and cups when the handle and spout haven't designed yet. Xinyuan kindly explained me different ways of holding teapot that was what she learnt from her teacher of professional tea serving. (picture 1) From the picture, she showed me one of the typical ways of holding teapot as a woman tea master, according to that, in general, their hands are small than men's. She also mentioned that the way to hold is not strict for tea enthusiasts.

Then after two months, I brought my well-made tea set to them. I came across other two Finnish tea enthusiasts and tested my tea set with them (picture 2,3). This time we had a simplified Kungfu tea, and used my tea set, which included a teapot, three small tea cups and plates and a big plate, and Peng's glass serving cup and bamboo tea tray. Peng commented that: the water comes out very fluently and smoothly from the spout, and the big plate works very well when it was put underneath of the teapot (picture 4).

Again, when I got the new cups, I visited Teemaa for a test. This time we tried to serve a customer with my tea set. I explained my ideas and demonstrated the way of tea. The customer was sharing the tea with his friend. So I placed two big cup for them (picture 5,6). They quickly learnt how to using the serving cup and filter. From their smile, I guess they liked the tea set very well.

Other than talking with Peng and Xinyuan, I have also consulted the traditional potter and lacquer maker. At first, I do not dare to show my experiment pieces to a skillful maker. Because I am afraid that they would feel I was ruining the traditions. Unexpectedly, Mr. Duan, who is the master of pottery teapot, was so happy to see my teapot and commented: "it is wonderful, and I can see how many efforts you have put on the details. I wish to use the real pot instead of just seeing it from pictures." And during the thesis development I often talked with my friend Mr. Fan, who is studying lacquer in Ishikawa Prefecture's Wajima City, Japan. He has to study one specific lacquer technique for five years in the school, and this is his second year. Apart from some guides of the brush using, he is so excited to see what I was doing.



12

34

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Conclusion

During the thesis development, I have never stopped self-exploration. In both my thought and design, I aimed to find out the similarities rather than just reveal the differences. As dissimilarity appears throughout all different cultures and habits, but I believe people have the same true faith in the good life. Inspirations encountered that were attained through beautiful moments in my life helped to delineate my designs and contributed in enhancing my thoughts. Although the thesis question of creating a tea set and exploring the surface treatment seemed simple and straightforward, it felt that I have spanned thousands of miles, across the vast sea, to reach the destination.

In terms of the outcome, I consider my work as a work in progress. Although a new material enriched my perspective on creativity, I have had to narrow down my thoughts and to compromise the result with time and other limits. It has been a great opportunity to discover fields that I had never encountered before such as lacquer, tea wares, and glass casting, and I would like to continue exploring them further. I will look forward to putting up a small-scale production in China, and will then face different challenges and problems.

Throughout my thesis development, I have focused on creating the form and paying attention to the details which I finally used in my lacquer surface treatment, yet those that I haven't gone further with during the process have also been inspirational. I am sure that the accumulation of knowledge and thoughts from this experience will guide me to develop another sphere in the design.

So, as I write this, the summer in Finland is surprisingly splendid for August. This will be the last summer I can spend in Finland. As time starts to count down the memories of the last four years start to surface. It was also August when I arrived in Helsinki. Although the summers are short and the tedious long and dark winters have occupied a greater part of my time here. I am sometimes a sentimental person when I see the summer passing and winter coming, but it is also about the end of one period of time and the beginning of another. So it is time to end one journey and start another one. I have gained countless knowledge and experience during my master study, and I am so grateful to my tutors, teachers, friends and my family who have kindly supported me all the way.



*Photo in midnight sunlight,
July, 2015, Viikki forest, Helsinki*

into surface



Teapot: 9x14x8.5(h)cm, 250ml

Cup(small): 6x6x3.5(h), 30ml

Plate(small): 8.5x1(h)cm

Wooden tray: 24x24x3(h)cm





Tea caddy: 6.5x7(h)cm

Cup(big): 7x8(h)cm, 100ml

Plate(big): 11x1.5(h)cm







走进



Most of my lacquer wares have 6-7 layers of lacquer, but the teapot has 10 layers. I spent more a week time for that.









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List of figures

Images are taken by the author unless otherwise stated.

Figure 6 http://www.wirkkala.fi/e_wirkkala/Production/Pages/Sculptures_files/Media/ANS210g/ANS210g.jpg?disposition=download

Figure 8 http://static.artwe.com/images/art/201306/2593_11297_l_1372287914200.jpg

Figure 9 <http://archinect.com/nipponesque/r-i-p-mr-sori-yanagi>

Figure 10 <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O437597/bowl-unknown/>

Figure 14 http://static.artwe.com/images/art/201306/2593_11297_l_1372287914200.jpg

Figure 18 <http://img.chayu.com/article/1410/29/7ee6c8e0abab9dc45.jpg>

Figure 21 <http://www.g6hq.com/uploadfile/20120603/1529/5951.jpg>





Thanks to myself. 谢谢自己